

NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



SD LAUNCHES FALLEN HEROES BRIDGE DEDICATION PROGRAM

Governor Kristi Noem and the South Dakota Departments of Veterans Affairs, Military, and Transportation last week launched the new Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication Program. The program will dedicate state bridges after South Dakotans who died while in active service. More than 3,000 South Dakotans have made the ultimate sacrifice.

“Our fallen heroes are no longer with us, but their memory lives on in the hearts of their loved ones and our state,” said Whitlock. “Naming our South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen will give us an opportunity of remembrance, reflection, and respect—for honoring the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation. They cherished liberty and loved freedom enough to lay down their lives to preserve our way of life.”

The bridge on US 38/North River Street was dedicated to Second Lt. Maynard C. Freemole, a World War II veteran from Edgemont who died in combat on December 16, 1943, three months before his 21st birthday.

Special thanks to Fall River County VSO Dan Cullen for his work on this first bridge dedication.

“Maynard Freemole and other fallen heroes sacrificed their lives so that we can go on living as a free people, free to choose our own destiny in this great nation,” said Noem. “This is a way we can memorialize the sacrifices of our heroes. Their legacies will live on.”

Maynard’s nephew, Brad Freemole from Arizona, was able to join us for the dedication.

South Dakota plans to dedicate six bridges each year. Information on the program and application forms can be found at: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/>.



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IRONS SERVES ON STATE COMMITTEE

Governor Kristi Noem proclaimed yesterday as “Women’s Vote Centennial Celebration Day” in South Dakota. On December 4, 1919, South Dakota was one of the first states to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, approving it during a special legislative session.

“One-hundred years ago today, democracy expanded, and South Dakota moved to give women the right to vote,” said Noem. “These men and women were trailblazers, and I am proud of their courage to spark change for the greater good.”

To help commemorate and coordinate the statewide celebration of the Nineteenth Amendment’s 100-year anniversary, Noem has assembled the Women’s Vote Centennial Delegation. The group has been tasked with providing educational materials about the suffrage movement and stimulating opportunities that explore the journey to women’s right to vote.

“It’s important for our young people to understand the path suffragists had to walk in order to secure this right for women in our country,” Noem continued. “When we understand our history, we become more grateful for the rights we have and the liberties we enjoy.”

Throughout 2020, the delegation – along with the South Dakota State Historical Society and the Historical Society Foundation – will initiate projects commemorating the centennial of women’s suffrage.

Members of the delegation are:

- Pat Miller, Pierre - Chair
- Tracy Saathoff, Sioux Falls - Co-Chair
- Julie Bartling, Gregory
- Sue Gates, Aberdeen
- Peggy Gibson, Huron
- José Marie Griffiths, Madison
- Katie Hunhoff, Yankton
- Susan Irons, Canton
- Mary Jean Jensen, Lemmon
- Kay Jorgensen, Spearfish
- Kitty Kinsman, Rapid City
- Elsie Meeks, Pine Ridge
- Kristina Schaefer, Sioux Falls
- Hon. Karen Schreier, Sioux Falls
- Rep. Tamara St. John, Sisseton
- Ann McKay Thompson, Rapid City
- Suzanne Veenis, Sioux Falls



SD VETERANS COUNCIL HOSTED LEGISLATIVE FORUMS

This week the South Dakota Veterans Council hosted legislative forums in Sioux Falls and Watertown, and will be hosting one in Rapid City Saturday.

The forums afford the Veterans Council members to thank legislators for their past support and to outline their legislative agenda for 2020.

The Veterans Council also provided an update on the State Veterans Cemetery foundation fund.

Veterans Council legislative agenda items include: decommissioning of the Veterans Commission and replacing it with the Veterans Council, veterans tuition, a study on an east river State Veterans Home and/or nursing beds in current facilities, and enhancements to military specialty plates.



The Veterans Council is comprised of representatives of the American Legion, Disabled American Veterans, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Paralyzed Veterans of America, Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Vietnam Veterans of America.

VA LAUNCHES SOLID START TO ENSURE VETERANS ARE CONTACTED DURING INITIAL TRANSITION

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), in collaboration with the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security, introduced [VA Solid Start](#) which will proactively contact all newly separated service members at least three times during their first year of transition from the military.

The program will engage contact with approximately 200,000 Veterans each year and is part of [Executive Order 13822](#) which was issued to improve mental health care and access to suicide prevention resources available to transitioning uniformed service members in the year following discharge, separation, or retirement.

**Presidential Executive Order on
Supporting Our Veterans During
Their Transition From Uniformed
Service to Civilian Life**

— VETERANS | Issued on: January 9, 2018

“The stress of transition from service can lead to challenges or unmet health care needs for Veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “Through VA Solid Start, the department will ensure consistent, caring contact and help new Veterans get a solid start on their civilian lives.”

The goal is to establish a strong relationship between VA and transitioning service members, promoting awareness of VA benefits, services and partner resources available to them.

Veterans within their first year of separation from uniformed service experience suicide rates nearly two times higher than the overall Veteran suicide rate. Contacts through VA Solid Start — via phone calls or emails — will ensure transitioning service members are aware of the free VA mental health resources the department offers Veterans for up to a year, regardless of discharge status or service history.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, contact the Veterans Crisis Line to receive free, confidential support and crisis intervention available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 800-273-8255 and Press 1, text to 838255 or chat online at [VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat](https://www.veteranscrisisline.net/Chat).



MJFSVH STAFFING UPDATE

Please join SDDVA in recognizing Raven Rush, pharmacy technician, and Dyna Ferry, physical therapist at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home.

Raven Rush passed her pharmacy technician certification board exam and is now a certified pharmacy technician!

Dyna Ferry recently received her doctorate of physical therapy.

"We've always promoted personal and professional development within our campus," said Brad Richardson, superintendent of the State Veterans Home. "I'm excited to see continued growth in both of those areas. Raven and Dyna have distinguished themselves. We are so very proud of both of them, and we look to support others in their personal/professional development in the future."



Dyna Ferry



Raven Rush

Richardson noted, "We fully support our staff's professional and personal growth knowing as they become stronger, we become stronger."

TRAPP JOINS SDDVA TEAM

Cody Trapp has joined the SDDVA team and will serve as a state veterans service officer in the Claims Office in Sioux Falls.

Born and raised in the Sioux Falls area, Cody attended West Central High School. Upon graduating, he enlisted into the United States Marine Corps as a small arms repair technician, holding numerous collateral billets and serving on one of the Marine Corp's most demanding duty's as a Canvassing Recruiter in Bismarck, North Dakota. Cody served for 12 years and achieved the rank of staff sergeant and was honorably discharged in 2017.

Cody and his wife Jessica have one daughter.

In his free time you will most likely find Cody riding motorcycle, enjoying the great outdoors or simply spending quality time with his family.

Cody says he is honored to be part of the SDDVA team and looks forward to working with the Department, their partners, and veterans and their families .



VABHHCS/CVSO PARTNERSHIP

Beginning in December, veterans can meet with a county veteran service officer (CVSO) at the Pierre VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic. The CVSO will be holding office hours at the clinic every Wednesday morning from 8:00 a.m. to Noon.

The VA clinic is located at 1615 North Harrison, Suite 20 in the Northridge Plaza Mall.

County and tribal veterans service officers provide information, assistance, counseling, and referrals on a wide range of services, benefits, and veteran programs. A CVSO can work with the veteran, widows of veterans, dependent children of veterans as well as dependent parents who lost a son or daughter in military service. Appointments are not necessary and walk in's are welcome.



VA REPORTS SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN VETERAN USE OF TELEHEALTH SERVICES

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) found more than 900,000 veterans used [VA telehealth](#) services in fiscal year 2019 (FY) as revealed in a mid-October report.

The 17% increase over the prior fiscal year contributed to the VA's delivery of more than 2.6 million episodes of telehealth care in FY 2019.

"The VA is committed to offering veterans the health care they deserve, whenever and wherever they need it," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "We want every veteran to have a choice to schedule an in-person, telephone or video visit with their providers depending on their preferences for health care delivery."

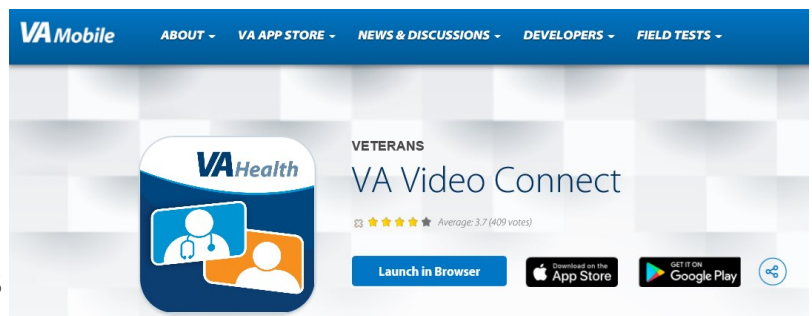


This comes as the VA improves its efforts to inform veterans about telehealth service options, and with completion of the first full fiscal year of [VA's Anywhere to Anywhere](#) initiative. The telehealth program allows VA health care teams to treat veterans regardless of their location, including across state lines. By the end of FY 2020, all primary care and mental health providers will be able to deliver care to patients, both in-person and via a mobile or web-based device.

Use of the [VA Video Connect](#) app, which connects veterans to their care teams through a secure video session, increased by 235% in FY 2019.

More than 99,000 veterans used the app at home, eliminating a trip to the nearest VA facility. More than 200,000 or approximately two-thirds of the 294,000 VA Video Connect appointments in FY 2019 were for telemental health visits.

Also this October, the VA launched ATLAS ([Accessing Telehealth through Local Areas Stations](#)) in Eureka, Montana to provide timely care for veterans who live long distances from VA medical centers or have poor internet connectivity at home. Additional locations are scheduled to open as pilot sites in select American Legion posts, Veterans of Foreign Wars posts and Walmart stores.



WARRIORS NEVER GIVE UP

It is no secret that fly-fishing is one of the most effective ways to help veterans cope with PTSD. Members of the military often feel as if they have a family they can relate to thanks to similar experiences on the battlefield and in the military. The camaraderie helps just as much as the hands-on activity. Fly fishing provides veterans with an opportunity to share stories with people who understand their situation, while physical activities give the nervous system something to focus on other than a traumatic injury.

Warriors Never Give Up, a local Christian nonprofit, is partnering with the local chapter of Project Healing Waters to demonstrate the benefits of fly fishing.

Healing Waters meets the first and third Tuesdays from 5 pm to 6:30 pm at the Outdoor Campus at Sertoma Park in Sioux Falls. Winter activities include fly-tying and rod-building. Participants learn to tie their own flies and fill up their fly boxes for the upcoming year. The rod building program is in coordination with a national contest in which participants can compete against veterans throughout the country if they wish. Winners are awarded destination fishing trips.

Warriors Never Give Up has added fly fishing to its 2020 fishing events and will be hosting eight combat or service-connected disabled veterans for a fly-fishing trip to the Black Hills, May 8-10, 2020. To be eligible for the event, veterans must participate in the winter Healing Waters program. There is no cost for the winter program or the Black Hills trip.

"We often see the spontaneous spiritual healing that takes place when veterans participate in our hunting and fishing events, stated Richard Ambrosius of Warriors Never Give Up. "Veterans share similar experiences and many combat veterans battle the same demons."

Warriors Never Give Up is a unique, Sioux Falls based nonprofit corporation, providing outdoor adventures for combat, deployed, and service-connected veterans. Project Healing Waters is a national program dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of disabled veterans and active military personnel through fly fishing.



PURPLE HEART FLAG ACT INTRODUCED

Congressman Brian Higgins (NY-26) joined a meeting of the Military Order of the Purple Heart Chapter 187 to announce introduction of the **Purple Heart Flag Act (H.R. 5237)**, legislation officially designating a Purple Heart flag and making public display of the flag at federal facilities protocol on specific days.

Similar to the Prisoner of War/Missing in Action (POW/MIA) flag, the bill would require display of the Purple Heart flag in our nation's war memorials, national cemeteries, veterans' hospitals, and the Departments of Defense, State, and Veterans Affairs on Armed Forces Day, Memorial Day, Flag Day, National POW/MIA Recognition Day, and Veterans Day.

"We could never do enough to repay those who are injured or killed in service to this nation, but regularly displaying a Purple Heart Flag would serve as a public declaration that says: we thank you, we honor you, and we will never forget the sacrifices made," said Congressman Higgins.

The idea for the bill was brought to Congressman Higgins by [Russell D. Ward](#), Vietnam War Veteran and Senior Vice Commander of Military Order of the Purple Heart Buffalo Chapter 187, during a veteran event in September.

Higgins introduced the bill on November 21, 2019 and is hoping for broad bipartisan support.

"A Purple Heart Flag would be a tremendous addition at government buildings nationwide, spreading honor throughout America for those who were killed or wounded in combat in all of America's wars while defending our freedom and principals," said U.S. Army Vietnam Veteran Russ Ward.

On August 7, 1782, General George Washington created the Badge of Military Merit, a piece of heart-shaped purple cloth embroidered with the word "merit" in white thread, presented to those engaging in extraordinary meritorious actions. Gen. Washington intended the award to be permanent, but it was only presented to a few soldiers who served during the Revolutionary War. The Purple Heart medal was later implemented in its current form in 1932 on President Washington's 200th Birthday by Army General Douglas MacArthur and officially developed into today's version by 1944. The Purple Heart is presented to service members of the U.S. armed forces who have been wounded or killed as a direct result of enemy action and is the oldest badge still awarded to the U.S. military today.



NATIONAL RESOURCE DIRECTORY INCLUDES 14,000 RESOURCES FOR VETERANS

National Resource Directory (NRD) is a free service that links more than 14,000 resources to service members, veterans and their families. The NRD was designed to specifically help those that are “wounded, ill, and injured” find services that support recovery, rehabilitation, and community reintegration.

The site was created through a partnership between the United States Departments of Veterans Affairs, Defense, and Labor. The NRD provides centralized access to resource information from the government (ranging from the federal to the local level). It also includes resources from non-profit, professional, educational, and military-service/veteran organizations.

All organizations are also vetted to ensure each resource is valid and accurate. Resource information includes:

- Benefits
- Education
- Employment and Training
- Housing
- Transportation

The website’s design features services divided into categories and the ability to search by keyword, resource type, or location. One section includes a list of organizations, such as the Red Cross, that works with the NRD to provide services to veterans and service members.

The website lists contact information for each resource, including an address and directions. NRD updates these resources frequently to provide the most accurate information available.

To discover new resources visit the National Resource Directory at <https://nrd.gov>.



U.S. POSTAL SERVICE ISSUING HEALING PTSD SEMI-POSTAL STAMP

Tens of millions of Americans will experience PTSD in their lifetimes. Today, the nation is increasingly dedicated to compassionately treating this mental health issue.

Many kinds of trauma can lead people to experience persistent symptoms such as intrusive thoughts, nightmares, and difficulty sleeping. Depression, anxiety, and fear can also occur. Though these symptoms may initially interrupt one's daily life, for most people they typically dissipate over time. However, if these problems continue for more than a month, PTSD may have developed. Symptoms associated with the disorder often can be broken down into four categories: avoidance, hyperarousal, increased negative beliefs and feelings, and reliving.

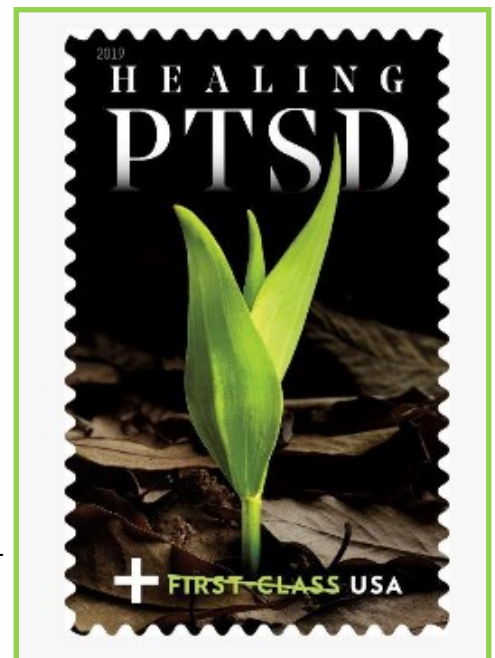
The two most common treatments for PTSD are medication and psychotherapy, also known as talk therapy. The disorder cuts across demographic lines, though women are at a greater risk than men. Women are more than twice as likely as men to suffer PTSD at some point in their lives.

Sold at a price of 65 cents per First-Class stamp, the PTSD stamp is a semi-postal. The price of a semi-postal stamp pays for the First-Class single-piece postage rate in effect at the time of purchase plus an amount to fund causes that have been determined to be in the national public interest. By law, revenue from sales (minus postage and the reasonable reimbursement of costs to the Postal Service) is to be transferred to a selected executive agency or agencies. Net proceeds from this stamp will be distributed to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, which oversees the National Center for PTSD.

Customers may purchase stamps and other philatelic products through The Postal Store at usps.com/shop, by calling 800-STAMP24 (800-782-6724), by mail through *USA Philatelic*, or at Post Office locations nationwide.

The Postal Service receives no tax dollars for operating expenses and relies on the sale of postage, products and services to fund its operations.

With this semi-postal stamp, the U.S. Postal Service will raise funds to help treat those impacted by post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The stamp features a photo illustration of a green plant sprouting from the ground, which is covered in fallen leaves. The image is intended to symbolize the PTSD healing process, growth and hope. Art director Greg Breeding designed the stamp with original art by Mark Laita.



SD LEADERS VISIT SURINAME TO BOLSTER STATE PARTNERSHIP

SDNG leaders met with Suriname's minister of defense, the U.S. ambassador to Suriname, and other SDF leaders to collaborate on ideas for working together and providing future training opportunities for both organizations.

South Dakota and Suriname, in coordination with U.S. Southern Command, established a successful security cooperation relationship in 2006 under the National Guard Bureau's State Partnership Program. Since then, numerous exchanges have taken place between the SDNG and Suriname's Defense Forces to share experiences and best practices in a variety of military training and topics.

"The South Dakota National Guard has an excellent relationship with Suriname," said Maj. Gen. Jeff Marlette, SDNG adjutant general. "It's been a good program over the years. We do many engagements each year with them coming to South Dakota and South Dakota going to Suriname."

The State Partnership Program provides unique capacity-building capabilities to combatant commanders through partnerships between U.S. states and foreign countries. The program helps to support U.S. national interests and security cooperation goals by engaging partner nations through military-to-military exchanges.

The partnership has made an impact to both organizations over the past 13 years. Every year, nearly a dozen exchanges take place between SDNG and SDF service members that enhances training, skills, techniques and operational processes and procedures.

"The projects that the South Dakota National Guard have done over the years have always been very well received by the people," said Marlette. "We have done medical missions, engineering projects and exchanged leadership ideas. We have also worked on things that have national impact, such as how to respond in support of civil authorities in the event of a natural disaster or civil disturbance," added Marlette. "The exchange of ideas has been beneficial to both organizations."

During the visit, the SDNG also attended Suriname's National Day celebration.

The SDNG and Suriname will continue to explore new opportunities for the future of the partnership.

"The State Partnership Program is a great tool for U.S. Southern Command to use to help stabilize the region and combat foreign influences that might not share the same values and priorities of the United States," said Marlette. "The Suriname government likes working with us and we like working with them. This program will continue to be successful for many years into the future."



UPCOMING EVENTS

Dec 7—Custer Community Pearl Harbor Celebration—Crazy Horse Memorial laughing Water Restaurant—
11:00 am (MT)
Dec 9—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony—Flaming Fountain Veterans Memorial at
Capitol Lake in Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
Dec 11—Sioux Falls VA Stakeholders Conference Call
Dec 23-25—State Offices Closed

2020

Jan 1—State Offices Closed
Jan 14—State of the State Address
Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception
Feb 21-23—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Arrowwood Resort and Conference Center—
Oacoma
Mar 25—SD Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
Mar 27-29—SD Vietnam and Era Veterans Reunion—Dakota Sioux Casino—Watertown
May 15-17—DAV State Convention—Brookings
May 30—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7
Jun 18-21—American legion State Convention—Huron
Sep 10—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8 (Tentative)
Oct 11—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9 (Tentative)



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